

## Stage of Identity - 3-4 years - Who am I in relationship to others and the world

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**Coach Myrna--February 27, 2023**

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### Stage of Identity--3-4 years

The Stage of Identity covers the ages from 3 to 4 years old and this child is seeking answers to the question, “Who am I in relationship to others and the world?” As with the Stage of Exploration [www.coachmyrna.org/blog/stage-of-exploration-18-months-to-3-years](http://www.coachmyrna.org/blog/stage-of-exploration-18-months-to-3-years), this comes on the foundation of a strong attachment to the parent. Your child wants to know that you are nearby but there is a strong need to explore the world. They are embarking on the journey to become their own distinct self. “I am discovering that I can be me and keep my connection with you at the same time.”

It is important to recognize that they are trying on identities now which are not forecasting what they will be in the future. Examples of this are when your son wants to wear dress-up clothes—frilly dress and high heels. Or your young daughter wants to wear hardhat and obsessed with forklifts and backhoes. These are just examples of experimenting and discovering like they announce

that today they are a fairy princess, spiderman, or another superhero.

**What parents need to know about this stage:**

- Parent needs to acknowledge, validate, and mirror what the child is exploring right now. Say things like, "Oh, I see we have a visit from Batman or a beautiful princess today." This age child is a quick change artist, trying on different roles but always seeking the parent's approval.
- There is still need for safety boundaries and stepping to support when needed.. When we do this consistently, the effect carries over when we are not there.
- Three- and four-year-olds needs space to explore. As parents, we need to not take their distancing too personal; it is part of the stage and we need to be available when needed.
- Look for teaching opportunities that are supportive and encouraging, not punitive. Parents are the first great moral teachers.
- Say things like, "It's ok that you are mad but it is not ok to bite your sibling/others." Or "I see that you wanted that toy, didn't you? Sometimes I want something that someone else has but I cannot just take it from them. How about if you ask 'May I have a turn after you?'"
- If the parent has intense negative reactions to the child's expressions or behavior, it is important to explore your own wounding and need for healing. Children are excellent at pushing our buttons and bringing things to the surface that we may have forgotten or want to keep hidden. I like to think that when something surfaces in myself, it is something being uncovered or revealed that I need to pay attention to. It is an opportunity to be awakened to my own need for healing and my child is helping me to pay attention to it.

An excellent tool that work well with this age child is **Share the Control:**

- Control is a basic human need; it is like love. As parents, we can learn to give it away as much as possible by giving choices. The more we give away, the more we get back in cooperation.
- There are only a few basic guidelines: 1) Never give a choice that you don't like/doesn't fit your value system, 2) Give only two options and 3) the child has 10-20 seconds to decide--if they don't choose, you decide.
- Every choice you give becomes a "deposit" into your child's sense of

can be very powerful for a child.

- The more choices parents give, the better chance of having cooperative kids.
- When necessary, the parent can say, “Didn’t I give you a lot of choices today? This time, it’s my turn to decide. Thanks for understanding.”
- **Examples:**
  - Would you like milk or juice for breakfast?
  - Are you going to wear your red shirt or your green shirt?
  - Are you going to brush your teeth now or in five minutes?
  - Would you like carrots or peas for your vegetable?
  - Bedtime is in 15 minutes. Do you want a story before bed or no story tonight?
  - Do you want to carry your jacket or wear it?
  - Will you put your shoes on yourself or would you like my help?

**If you would like some support in your parenting, check out the next parenting small group online that I will be offering on Thursday evenings beginning March 2: [www.coachmyrna.org/7gifts.html](http://www.coachmyrna.org/7gifts.html)**

To purchase my book on  
Amazon: [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B09L7KS5VH](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B09L7KS5VH)

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*If you would like to know more about what I offer as a coach, please visit my website: [www.coachmyrna.org/](http://www.coachmyrna.org/) Find out more about Safe Conversations [www.coachmyrna.org/safe-conversations.html](http://www.coachmyrna.org/safe-conversations.html).*